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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003258

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM KDEM KIRF IZ

SUBJECT: NINEWA: MINORITY COMMUNITIES OPPOSE DELETION OF ARTICLE 50 FROM PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS LAW, BUT DON'T UNANIMOUSLY EMBRACE POLITICS

REF: BAGHDAD 3204

Classified By: Ninewa PRT Leader Alex Laskaris, Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

This is a Ninewa Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) message.

¶1. (C) Summary: Shaikhan Christians aligned with the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM) are angry over the omission of minority set-asides in the recently-adopted provincial election law. In a September 30 meeting in Tel Keif, they said that, although they prefer a form of &virtual autonomy,⁸ their fallback position is guaranteed representation in provincial, district and sub-district bodies. A diverse multi-ethnic, multi-religious delegation of minority community citizens from Tel Kayf district made a different point to us in a meeting on October 5, saying that integration into Ninewa Province as equal and indistinguishable citizens was in their communities' best interest. The internal debate within the Christian community in Ninewa is between those who want to assert themselves in the new Iraq through political organization, and those who prefer to be an economic and professional elite without a concurrent political identity. Other minority communities too are wrestling with the same questions -- how best to preserve community rights and identity in a rapidly changing Iraq. End summary.

¶2. (C) On September 30, PRT leader returned to Shaikhan (reftel reported on September 16 and 20 meetings with Yezidi Prince Tahseen Beg), this time to meet with the district's small Christian community, which numbers 150 families in the town, plus another 100 in rural areas, according to our interlocutors. On October 5, a Shaikhan delegation (an ad hoc committee formed in the last month) consisting of Tel Kayf district Christians, Turkmen, Shia, Yezidi and Sunni Arabs -- asked to see us on the FOB.

¶3. (C) We met in Shaikhan September 30 with 10 Christian residents. Although the venue was the local branch office of the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM), most participants said that they were independent. They asked to meet at the ADM building because they claimed it was the only place where they could talk to us without the presence of the Kurdish secret police. They identified Khairi, head of the local Assa,esh, as the true power in the district, and claimed that he was anti-Christian. They were also highly critical of Yezidi Prince Tahseen Beg, saying that he is a fanatic who ordered the killing of one of his own daughters for violating the group's strict mores.

¶4. (C) The Shaikhan Christians characterized the area in which they live as dominated politically by the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) through a Sunni Kurd hardliner and socially by an insular and fanatical (their view) Yezidi leadership. The Shaikhan Christians told us that they want guaranteed representation in provincial bodies, but added that what they need is autonomy. They made it clear they were not seeking geographic autonomy; rather, what they prefer is the ability to control the affairs of their community in village-level governance as well as in education

and law enforcement. After initial pleasantries, they launched into a tirade at the omission of guaranteed minority seats (Article 50) in the provincial election law. In their view, this omission further marginalizes them and speeds the rate of emigration from Shaikhan, and from Iraq. In their view, it also denies them government employment opportunities and access to government contracting.

¶5. (C) The October 5 multi-ethnic, multi-religious Tel Kayf delegation visiting the FOB represented itself as an ad hoc committee formed to represent the &true voices⁸ of the district. Their message was that they prefer to remain within Ninewa Province, not in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). The Assyrian spokesman for the group said that all the communities represented wanted to be Iraqis; as a Christian, he said that meant being part of a group that had always contributed merchants, scholars, professionals and civil servants to the Iraqi state. He acknowledged a political &glass ceiling⁸ but said that in previous regimes, Christians were part of a broader social contract) for better or worse) and had been able to thrive as a community. One of the Turkmen made it clear that his community identifies with their brethren in Tal Afar, not Kirkuk (i.e., that they do not subscribe to a political agenda grounded in their minority identity). The Shia participants stressed that sectarian violence was a political creation of irresponsible leaders. The Yezidi advised us that, although the Prince has influence, not all Yezidi follow him.

¶6. (C) Comment: Our emerging understanding is that) for our Nineva contacts -- it is no longer clear what it means to be an ethnic or religious minority in Iraq. Some, particularly Christians, prefer the old paradigm: a minority

BAGHDAD 00003258 002 OF 002

that &knew its place,⁸ but whose place was prominence in business, commerce, high-prestige professions, academia and the civil service. A discrete political identity was not something to be sought; rather it was to be eschewed (and was even potentially dangerous). There are more assertive political voices in the Nineva Christian community, however -- ones who seek the same good, protection under the law, but via a significantly different methodology. It may be unreasonable to expect clarity or consensus from a Christian minority that views its current security as a highly reversible phenomenon, and which is living in uncertain times. Other minority communities too are wrestling with the same questions -- how best to preserve community rights and identity in a rapidly changing Iraq. End comment.

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